

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
Bureau of Customs and Border Protection

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2003

Missing Woman's Body Believed Found
Year-Long Investigation and 2nd Search Leads to Discovery

CHULA VISTA, Calif. – Human remains, believed to be a young female missing for nearly a year, were discovered south of the U.S./Mexico border this morning.

The Mexican Consulate office contacted the Border Patrol last spring with reports of an 18-21 year-old female who disappeared while being smuggled into the United States. BORSTAR, the Border Patrol's search & rescue team, led a thorough search of the Smith Canyon area north of the border last year, but were unable to locate the missing woman.

Agents refused to give up the search, and began a ten-month investigation into the smuggling activities that resulted in her disappearance. Their persistence led to information that narrowed the search down to an area south of the border. Border Patrol agents utilized their Mexican liaison office to coordinated a second search attempt today.

San Diego County Sheriff's Search and Rescue team (SAR) volunteers and K-9s crossed into Mexico and conducted a search with representatives from Mexico's Grupo BETA. BORSTAR set up a mobile command post near the border and provided coordinates to the volunteer search team members.

Forty-five minutes after the search began, Sheriff's SAR volunteers discovered human remains scattered across a half-mile area south of Smith Canyon. The remains, along with some faded clothing, have been tentatively identified as those of the missing young woman. Final positive identification is pending DNA testing, which could take several months.

"I'm extremely pleased at the dedication of the agents involved in this operation," said Chief Patrol Agent William T. Veal. "Border Patrol agents knew that this young woman had a family who loved her. She was a human being that needed to be found."

Those involved in the efforts to recover the remains were pleased at the thought of offering some degree of closure for the family of the missing girl. The discovery is a credit to the shared efforts of the investigators, Mexican officials, and search and rescue volunteers.

~ USBP ~